

FLS PRACTICE FUNDING RE-ESTABLISHED

THE END OF A LONG PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY

New Managing Director of Victoria Legal Aid Bevan Warner has confirmed that the long standing funding arrangement for the practice should continue which ends

a long period of uncertainty about the status of the practice funding.

'The decision is very welcome and enables services to clients to be maintained' said Jenny Blakey the Convenor of the management committee.

'On behalf of the Committee I want to thank all the service members and members of the public who supported

the practice during this uncertainty; I also want to acknowledge the continued great work of the practice team and all the other staff while we were seeking a solution.'

**Jenny Blakey,
Convenor**

CRIMINAL RECORDS PROJECT

Having a criminal record, even in relation to a relatively minor offence, can have dramatic impacts on a person's wellbeing and capacity to engage in community life.

As our culture becomes increasingly risk adverse, many find themselves facing multiple barriers to meaningful employment as a result of records that no longer reflect their circumstances or behaviour. Around 500,000 people are sentenced in Australian courts annually. Many will have been charged with minor offences, and will be unlikely to re-offend. Whilst the types of employment where criminal record checks occur continuously expands, no evidence base has been provided to show persons with a criminal record are more likely to commit offences in the workplace.

In December 2008 the Department of Justice released a Draft Spent Convictions Bill Consultation Paper for community comment. This Paper formed part of long-term process by which the Standing Committee of Attorney General has been working towards uniform legislation across the States and Territories to deal with criminal records. Unfortunately the proposal represented a lowest common denominator approach to dealing with the issues raised by increased reliance on criminal record information for Victorians.

Fitzroy Legal Service put forward a submission to the Department of Justice outlining concerns in relation to standard criminal record checks, and made representations regarding the loss of opportunity and productivity faced by many of our clients.

In particular, submissions were made that controlling the release of information to reflect adequately the value that all persons should be able to have a second

chance at full and equal participation in the community should be the approach adopted by the Victorian government. Concerns were raised that where specific regulatory processes are already in place, such as is the case for lawyers, doctors, taxi drivers, people working with children and many other fields of employment, further checks should not be occurring. The consequences of the present exclusionary policies including unemployment, under-employment, associated harms to health and wellbeing, and wasted human resources were raised also.

We are interested to hear from any community members about their experiences or concerns in relation to criminal records, and can provide assistance on a case by case basis where specific barriers to inclusion are being experienced.

HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Abby Ogada-Osir has once again produced a fantastic Front Window Art production.

Meghan Fitzgerald our Community Development Worker was also busy on Human Rights day organising a barbecue which was attended by local people and clients of homeless and other service providers. Richard Wynne our local member.



STAFF

PUBLICATIONS AND WEB COORDINATOR STARTS

Welcome to Marlena Pitrone who started work in January this year. Marlena brings extensive publishing, non government organisation welfare and community legal centre experience to the position. We are lucky to have recruited someone with Marlena's skills and she has quickly taken up the reins of this busy position.

Many thanks to Simon Roberts who left the position to take up a management position at another community legal centre. Simon was an enthusiastic and

effective coordinator and was also acting Executive Officer for a few of months. During Simon's period in the position FLS was successful in securing a Legal Service Board grant to make the Law Handbook free on line. This is a project that Marlena is now implementing.

NEW TRAINEE

Kira Levin has recently started as the 09-10 Trainee. Kira has extensive community law experience and was assisting with a County court matter within her first couple of weeks. Welcome Kira!!

LONG TIME FLS VOLUNTEER ADMITTED

Over almost ten years Petra Watson has been a day volunteer, night volunteer and a management committee member for eight years. She was recently admitted and has rejoined the night service. Congratulations.



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